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Remarks on Dental Education,

MADE BEFORE THE

SOUTHERN DENTAL ASSOCIATION,

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At a meeting of the American Medical Association held several years ago, Prof. Daniel Drake, an eminent medical teacher, said, when medical education was under discussion, that he had a right to speak on that subject, for he had been connected with and resigned from more medical faculties than any other person in the profession. The extended experience of that distinguished man has not fallen to my lot, but I can claim to have had as long and as varied an experience as a teacher, in connection with dental colleges, as any one present. This experience, embracing a period of seventeen years, has taught me among other things one important fact, viz. that the occupancy of a professorship in a dental college is an expensive luxury, and that no one will continue to hold such a position year after year, unless, animated by an earnest desire to elevate the profession, he is willing to make sacrifices of time, money, ease, and pleasure, which very few are willing to do. Only those will continue to teach for a lengthened period whose hearts are in the cause. I have known men, whose abilities and attainments eminently fitted them as teachers, after a few years of valuable service to the profession, to retire from the position on account of the tax upon time, interference with practice, exhausted energies, or failing health; leaving it with regret, they have, however, continued enthusiastic advocates of dental colleges. One of the gentlemen who preceded me in the discussion gave his experience as a student and teacher; following his example, permit me to present mine. As a graduate of one of the largest and most respected medical colleges in the country, my experience as a

student and the continued opportunities of observing the methods of teaching in medical colleges of later years convince me that the curriculum of instruction in properly organized dental colleges will not only bear a favorable comparison with those institutions in what is attempted to be taught, but that the *theoretical* and *practical* are more thoroughly combined than it is possible to do in general medical and surgical instruction. In the establishment of dental colleges the aim of the founders should be not merely to meet the demands of the present but the wants of the future. With regard to the charge that the colleges are antagonistic and bidding for students, if enlarging the opportunities for study and practice in the colleges for the students, from four to six and then to nine months, be regarded in that light, the charge may be admitted, but in no other way does it hold good. One of the speakers said that the dental profession had advanced and the colleges have not. I would ask, is he familiar with the dental colleges as they were years ago, with regard to means of illustration and methods of teaching, and as they are now, from personal examination of all the institutions? I remember them in the beginning with insignificant specimens, old and inexpensive apparatus to illustrate the lectures of gentlemen who fully appreciated how difficult it was to make their students comprehend what they were endeavoring to impart to them under such circumstances. Now, contrasting this with the extensive and valuable museums, the specimens purchased by individual members of the faculties at great cost, the care and attention that is paid in illustrating to the fullest extent every subject presented, and these facts, along with the improved clinical advantages, prove that the colleges have not remained stationary, but have advanced. Again, in the advancement of the profession, have the professors of dental colleges been idle? Who have edited the dental journals? Who have been more active and indefatigable contributors to the literature of the profession, or taken a more prominent part in organizing and attending dental societies, local, State, and national? I allude to this to prove that they have done their part in the progressive development of the profession. While thus speaking in defense of dental colleges, no one recognizes more fully their deficiencies than I do; but when it is borne in remembrance that what has been accomplished in this direction has been through the exertions of a few men, who have had no aid from municipal or State government or the munificence of private individuals, one may justly say criticism is easy, execution difficult. Turning the tables, I would ask, What are the practitioners of dentistry doing individually with regard to the education of the profession? Is it not true that a man can enter the majority of dental offices, and after a short period, a few weeks or months at best, during which he has had few if any opportunities beyond those afforded in the laboratory of learning anything about dentistry, engage at once in

practice, with a certificate from his preceptor indorsing his competency? Are those who so freely criticise dental colleges doing their part as private preceptors? Do they inquire into the mental, moral, and physical qualities of those whom they receive as private students, supply them with the latest and best text-books, direct their course of reading, and subject them to stated examinations to ascertain what progress they have made, and to correct erroneous impressions which they may have formed? A few members of the profession do this, but they are exceedingly limited in number, and the yearly additions to the profession are mainly through private preceptors, who fail to do their duty by those who come under them as students; only a small proportion of the latter attend college and graduate. The alumni of the dental colleges have done much toward the advancement of the profession during the past few years, and they embrace among their number some of the most cultivated minds and skillful practitioners in our ranks. For years I have advocated the enactment of State laws which would make it obligatory upon students of dentistry that they should undergo two years of private preceptorship, attend two full courses of lectures, and graduate from a respectable dental college before entering upon practice. With reference to the charge of looseness in passing men through the colleges, if true of some, it does not hold good against all. Speaking for the one with which I have the honor to be connected, the faculty have been exceedingly careful on this point, and conferred the degree only upon those who have complied with its rules and passed a thorough examination. During the past session, 1872-73, of ninety-one students who attended lectures in the Philadelphia Dental College, fifty-nine were entitled to present themselves as candidates for graduation, and only forty-nine received the degree of Doctor of Dental Surgery. Several of the candidates advised by the dean not to come forward, decided to attend another course; one was denied an examination on account of intemperate habits; another, who had presented credentials of five years of practice, being unable to produce corroborative evidence when the correctness of the statements was called in question, had to stand aside; and four others, failing to pass the examinations, were denied the degree. Thus ten men were unable to graduate. The endowment of dental colleges, proposed by one of the speakers, is a movement in the right direction. But who are sufficiently liberal to do it? Have you any idea of the expenses attendant upon a single session? Four other gentlemen and myself paid \$700 apiece, \$3500 in the aggregate, to deliver the first course of lectures in the Philadelphia Dental College to *eleven students*. This money was cash advanced, and did not include the cost of valuable specimens, apparatus, etc., used, nor the loss of time in practice. The receipts from the students who attended the *second term* were nearly

sufficient to cover the expenses, and an additional assessment of *only* \$50 on each member of the faculty (\$250 in all) was required for the privilege of delivering that course of lectures. Each succeeding year valuable specimens and apparatus have been added to the museum; and in anticipation of the eighth session, the faculty made additions and improvements in the college which cost \$4000, and lectured that session without any pecuniary return. Can those who are so ready to criticise dental colleges show a better record in behalf of dental education? It would take at least \$250,000 to properly endow a dental college; the interest to be devoted to paying the expenses of the institution, including the professors and demonstrators' fees.